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AUTHOR Dieterich, Dan
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ABSTRACT

College English faculty should consider the benefits of business writing consulting. Personal fringe benefits for consultants include traveling and meeting interesting people, and generally having attentive students. Writing consultants enhance their knowledge of business writing, improve their teacher competency, and improve their writing and editing competency. In addition, consultants often find opportunities for writing research. Consultants also provide benefits for their educational institution: they become better teachers, they enhance the reputation of an institution, they sometimes attract students to an institution, and they often discover fund-raising opportunities. Finally, business writing consultants provide solid benefits for their clients as highly trained teachers who serve their clients at a fraction of the price of a full-time employee. (HB)

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Fringe Benefits of Writing Consulting
by
Dan Dieterich
University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point
Business Writing Consultant

What else do you get out of writing consulting besides money?
A great deal!

I. Personal Fringe Benefits

As a writing consultant, you are sometimes invited to travel to distant countries and experience different cultures. You may be invited to dine at elegant restaurants. But, whether that happens or not, you are sure to meet some good people when you conduct writing training programs or do writing and editing for business clients. Here are some other personal fringe benefits you receive:

Attentive Students

You get the satisfaction of knowing that you're helping people who want your help. That may or may not be the case in your college classroom. College students attend your classes for a wide variety of reasons besides the desire to become better writers. Participants in writing programs you conduct in business and industry are more likely to be there because they want to hone their writing skills. It feels good to teach someone who wants to learn what you're attempting to teach.

Enhanced Knowledge of Business Writing

Where better to learn about writing in the workplace than in the workplace? Textbooks are well and good, but they're inevitably behind the times and cannot accurately portray workplace writing in all fields and in all regions. By conducting writing training programs, you learn firsthand the writing problems and constraints that people face on the job in your community. You also learn the techniques people employ to overcome those problems and respond to those constraints. Business writing teachers are fascinated by business writing; we enjoy learning more about our field.

Improved Teaching Competency

Let's face it: The average person who has spent ten or fifteen years in the workplace is a more sophisticated consumer of your services than is the average 18-year-old. Business clients have higher standards for teaching. They expect and demand more of you.

If you tell college students that two plus two equals five, they write it down and attempt to memorize it for the test. Say the same thing to your business clients, and they challenge you. Give a boring lecture to college students, and they doze off. Do the same thing with business clients, and they fire you. Lousy teachers don't make the grade as consultants. If you're a good teacher, however, you receive external validation of your teaching competency from your consulting. And by associating with other trainers and consultants, you become an even better teacher.

Improved Writing/Editing Competency

There's no better way to hone your own writing and editing skills than by putting them to work in a business context. You certainly put the lie to "Those who can't do, teach!" when those outside your institution hire you to ply your trade. You not only put your theories about effective writing into practice, but you also learn how various discourse communities affect and respond to those theories. As a result, you return to your college classroom with a broader perspective and greater flexibility.

Writing Research Opportunities

Some college writing teachers enter the consulting profession primarily for the opportunity it provides for workplace research. Most writing consultants deal with writing samples provided by the participants in their training programs. With authorization from the writers and from the client organization, you can make these samples the basis of valuable research. In addition, you can establish relationships through consulting which enable you to do more elaborate long-term research in client companies. Through such research, you benefit your institution, your client, and yourself.

II. Fringe Benefits to Your Educational Institution

Fellow teachers in your department may not like it that you are a writing consultant. Your college president or chancellor, however, will probably be delighted. Administrators realize that your college receives a wide array of benefits when you consult:

Better Teaching

The best college teachers of writing that I know are also writing consultants. And that's no accident. They have met high standards for teaching in the workplace. They have practical experience in doing business writing and editing. They use real examples of business writing in their classes. They invite guest speakers from business to speak with their students. Through their consulting contacts, they open doors for their students to move into the workplace through informational interviews, internships, and job shadowing programs. And, as a result, they afford their students a better education than non-consultants can.

Better Reputation in the Community

You are personally responsible for the reputation of your educational institution in your community. Community members judge your college or university based on what they know about you and other faculty members. Unfortunately, community members don't know much about English teachers except what they learn from the stereotyped "Miss Fidditch" image they see in movies and on television. If, however, through your consulting, you show community members that you are an accomplished, professional teacher/trainer or writer/editor, they see your institution in a new and better light.

Recruitment of Students

If you are an effective consultant, you reawaken in participants in your programs a thirst for learning. When they talk with you over lunch or after your sessions, they say things like, "I had forgotten how much fun learning can be." They then ask you about follow-up courses they might take at your institution. Sometimes this leads them to take a course or two in evenings or on weekends. Sometimes it leads to participants completing advanced degrees on your campus.

Fund Raising Opportunities

Looking for the money to bring a poet or novelist to campus to talk with your students? Does your department want a few more computers, a new laser printer, or some desktop publishing software? Is your campus searching for a way to fund its building program? When the time comes to go to the business community for donations, it's good to be on a first name basis with the person who holds the checkbook. When you climb down from your ivory tower and start consulting, you begin establishing a network of contacts in the business community that can significantly improve your institution's ability to fund its programs.

III. Fringe Benefits to Your Consulting Clients

Times are tough. Businesses are looking for a bargain, and you are a bargain. You have outstanding credentials. You know all the latest research on business writing. You have substantial experience in teaching/writing/editing. And, best of all, you work cheap! Now, it may not seem like cheap to you, when you compare consulting wages with what you receive from your college or university. The fact is, however, that it would cost a lot more for your client to hire a full-time employee to do what you do--and they probably wouldn't do it nearly as well as you do.

The greatest problems most businesses encounter today are communication problems. Every day, business people send out letters that anger and antagonize customers. They send out memos that alienate fellow employees. They send out reports that are confusing and misleading. They send out proposals that get nothing more than a belly laugh from their readers. Ineffective writing decreases productivity and reduces profitability. It puts hundreds of companies out of business.

Your consulting clients aren't doing you any favors by hiring you. To the contrary, you are doing your clients a favor. You earn every dollar you receive. And you earn your fringe benefits too.